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The Equality State's Living Standard Shifts in Rankings

CHEYENNE -- The U.S. Census Bureau recently released the results of the 2009 American Community Survey (ACS). The release is based on survey responses collected over the course of 2009 and provides data about the nation's socioeconomic, housing and demographic characteristics. The ACS is a separate survey from the decennial census count.

ACS data are critical components of the nation's information infrastructure, providing data essential to the economy and local communities, and the data are required by numerous federal programs and for planning and decision making at the state and federal level. ACS data help communities and businesses create jobs, plan for the future, establish new businesses, and improve the economy

This release covers more than 40 topics, such as income, educational attainment, housing, and family structure for all geographies with populations of 65,000 or more.

2009 ACS Highlights for Wyoming

The rankings in the following context include 50 states and Washington D.C. The quotes are from Dr. Wenlin Liu, senior economist in the Economic Analysis Division, State of Wyoming.

Earnings, Income, and Poverty

- Median household income in Wyoming was \$52,664, compared to \$50,221 for the U.S. The State's figure ranked the 20th highest in the nation in 2009, up from 36th in 2000.
- The percent of Wyoming residents below the poverty level was 9.8%, compared to 14.3% nationally. Wyoming ranked the 46th highest in the nation, down from 26th in 2000.
- The poverty rate for single-mother families with related children under 18 year was 35.9%, compared to 43.5% for the U.S. It ranked the 42nd highest in the nation, down from 13th in 2000.

“Driven by energy exploration, Wyoming's strong economic performance in the first decade of the 21st century has lifted the average household's living standard to another level.”

- The Gini Index of 0.415 was ranked the lowest in Wyoming together with Alaska and Utah, which means that income was more equally distributed among households for these states. The Gini Index is a standard economic measure of income inequality. A society that scores 0.0 on the Gini scale has perfect equality in income distribution. The higher the number over 0, the higher the inequality.
- Median earnings for male full-time workers were \$47,828, compared to \$45,485 for the U.S. It ranked the 18th highest in the nation.

- Median earnings for female full-time workers were \$31,308, compared to \$35,549 nationally. It ranked the 35th highest in the nation.
- Women's earnings as percentage of men's earnings were 65.5%, compared to 78.2% at the national level. It ranked the 51st highest, which put Wyoming at the bottom in the nation.

"With the highest wage rate among industries, the mining sector (including oil & gas extraction) hires approximately 9 percent of Wyoming workers, and this proportion was higher than any other state in the nation. Most importantly, 88 percent of employees in the mining industry are male."

- Percent of households in the State with cash public assistance income was 1.5%, compared to 2.6% for the U.S. It ranked the 50th highest (2nd lowest) in the nation.
- Percent of households with food stamp/supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP) receipt was 5.2%, compared to 10.3% for the U.S. It ranked the 51st highest (the lowest) in the nation.

"The proportion of extremely poor Wyoming residents with income below one-half of their poverty threshold was the lowest in the nation."

Health Insurance

- The percentage of the population without health insurance coverage was 15.2%, compared to 15.1% for the U.S. It ranked the 19th highest in the nation.
- Percent of children without health insurance coverage was 9.0%, compared to 8.6% nationally. It ranked the 17th highest in the nation.
- Percent of direct purchase (insurance purchased directly from an insurance company by a household or an individual) health insurance coverage was 16.1%, compared to 13.1% for the U.S. It ranked the 9th highest in the nation.

"Wyoming has a smaller proportion of large private businesses, which tend to purchase health insurance for their employees."

Education

- Percent of people 25 years and over who have completed high school was 91.8%, compared to 85.3% for the U.S. This ranked Wyoming at the top in the nation.
- Percent of people 25 years and over who have completed a bachelor's degree was 23.8%, compared to 27.9% nationally. It ranked 41st highest in the nation.

"Nearly one-fifth of Wyoming workers are working in mining and construction industries, the highest proportion in the nation, where higher education is mostly not required."

Mobility and Language

- Percent of population who are foreign-born was 3.1%, compared to 12.5% in the U.S. It ranked the 44th highest in the nation.
- Percent of population born in State of residence was 42.4%, compared to 67.5% for the U.S. It ranked the 50th highest in the nation.

- Percent of people age 1 year and over who lived in a different state 1 year ago was 5.8%, comparing to 2.3% nationally. It ranked the 3rd highest in the nation.

“With basically employment driven migration, Wyoming has been experiencing strong population growth since 2004, riding the mining boom. On the other hand, the State is short of opportunities for young people with higher education.”

- Percent of people 5 years and over who speak English not "Very Well" was 1.8%, compared to 8.6% in the U.S. It ranked the 46th highest in the nation.

Journey-to-Work

- Mean travel time to work of workers age 16 years and over who did not work at home was 18.0 minutes, compared to 25.1 minutes for the U.S. It ranked the 46th highest in the nation.
- Percent of workers age 16 years and over who worked outside county-of-residence was 7.3%, compared to 27.3% at the national level. It ranked the 47th highest in the nation.

“The fact that Wyoming has the smallest population and the second lowest population density in the nation without large metropolitan areas makes the journey to work a lot easier for workers.”

Housing

- Percent of households that were occupied by owners was 70.9%, compare to the U.S. rate of 65.9%. It ranked the 11th highest in the nation.
- Percent of housing units that are mobile homes was 14.3%, compared to 6.5% for the U.S. It ranked the 5th highest in the nation.
- Percent of occupied housing units with gas as principal heating fuel was 72.3%, compared to 54.9% in the U.S. It ranked the 12th highest in the nation.
- The median housing value of owner-occupied housing units was \$184,000, compared to \$185,200 for the U.S. It ranked the 23rd highest in the nation, up from 35th in 2000.
- Median gross rent of renter-occupied housing units was \$700, compared to \$842 for the U.S. average. It ranked the 33rd highest in the nation, up from the 48th in 2000.
- The percentage of mortgage owners spending 30 percent or more of their household income on selected monthly owner costs (including mortgage, insurance, property taxes, and utilities) was 26.7%, compared to 37.5% in the U.S. It ranked the 44th highest in the nation.
- Percent of renter-occupied units spending 30 percent or more of their household income on rent and utilities was 32.8%, compared to 47.7% for the U.S. It ranked the 51st highest (the lowest) in the nation.

“Housing expense comprises the largest portion in an average consumer’s budget. The data on housing cost expenses for home owners and renters can be an excellent measure of housing affordability and burden if used in conjunction with income data.”

“Despite the fast increase in home prices and rent since 2000, Wyoming still has lower housing burdens for mortgage owners, and the lowest shelter burdens for renters comparing to other parts of the country.”

Employment

- Percent of people age 16 to 64 years who are in the labor force was 79.6%, compared to 75.0% in the U.S. It ranked 8th highest in the nation.
- Percent of people age 65 years and over who are in the labor force was 19.0%, compared to 15.7% for the U.S. It ranked the 8th highest in the nation.
- Percent of children under 6 years old with all parents in the labor force was 66.4%, compared to 64.4% nationally. It ranked the 25th in the nation.

“A good work ethic and low unemployment rate make the State’s higher labor force participation possible. In addition, 8.7 percent of Wyoming workers hold multiple jobs, the 6th highest in the nation.”

Household Relationship

- Percent of population who are white alone, non-Hispanic was 86.1, compared to 64.9% for the U.S. It ranked the 9th highest in the nation.
- Number of persons per household was 2.48, compared to 2.63 in the U.S. It ranked 36th highest in the nation.
- Percent of households with one or more people age 65 years and over was 21.8%, compared to 24.2% for the U.S. It ranked the 44th highest in the nation.

“Though Wyoming has one of the lowest tax burdens for their residents, the net in-migration for retirees is negative for the State as a whole, which means that the number of retired people leaving the State out-numbers the retired population moving into Wyoming. Only a few places such as Cody, Sheridan, Buffalo, and Evanston consistently attract retired individuals.”

- The marriage (marriage in last year) rate per 1,000 men age 15 years and over was 30.7, compared to 19.1 in the U.S. It ranked the 1st in the nation.
- The marriage (marriage in last year) rate per 1,000 women age 15 years and over was 28.7, compared to 17.6 for the U.S. It ranked the 1st in the nation.
- Percent of households that are married-couple families was 54.5%, compared to 49.1% at the national level. It ranked the 3rd highest in the nation.
- Percent of the civilian population age 18 years and over who are veterans was 12.4%, compared to 9.5% for the U.S. It ranked the 4th highest in the nation.

“Religious reasons and the conservative nature of the State may explain the high marriage rate.”

The American Community Survey is the successor to the former census "long-form" that historically produced demographic, housing, and socioeconomic data for the nation as part of the once-a-decade census. The decennial census program, which includes the ACS and the 2010 Census, serves as the basis for the allocation of more than \$400 billion in federal funds to state, local, and tribal governments every year. These vital data also guide planning in the private sector as well as the work done by policymakers at all levels of government and in communities of all sizes. ACS data for smaller areas will be released in December 2010, while the 2010 Census counts will be released at the end of December for the State, and in February for counties, municipalities, and other areas.

You may access the ACS profiles for Wyoming’s geographic areas at <http://eadiv.state.wy.us/ACS/ACS.html>

Detailed ACS tables are available at U.S. Census Bureau’s American FactFinder: <http://factfinder.census.gov>